



## Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East

By Nicolas Pelham

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### **Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East** By Nicolas Pelham

When the Ottoman Empire fell apart, colonial powers drew straight lines on the map to create a new region — the Middle East — made up of new countries filled with multiple religious sects and ethnicities. Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, for example, all contained a kaleidoscope of Sunnis, Kurds, Shias, Circassians, Druze and Armenians. Israel was the first to establish a state in which one sect and ethnicity dominated others. Sixty years later, others are following suit, like the Kurds in northern Iraq, the Sunnis with ISIS, the Alawites in Syria, and the Shias in Baghdad and northern Yemen.

The rise of irredentist states threatens to condemn the region to decades of conflict along new communal fault lines. In this book, *Economist* correspondent and *New York Review of Books* contributor Nicolas Pelham looks at how and why the world's most tolerant region degenerated into its least tolerant. Pelham reports from cities in Israel, Kurdistan, Iraq and Syria on how triumphant sects treat their ethnic and sectarian minorities, and he searches for hope — for a possible path back to the beauty that the region used to and can still radiate.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"It is rare to come across a book on the region that charts a positive path for the future; rarer still to find one that advocates religious leadership and pragmatic communalism as the means for reaching peace....[Pelham] makes a powerful case that a regional alliance of overlapping millets, not connected with territorial boundaries, offers a better vision for restoring stability to the Middle East than the current agendas for conflict management."

--Jonathan Steele, *The Guardian*

"A fine collection of essays -- a rare combination of on-the-ground reportage and profound historical knowledge."

--Ian Black, *The Guardian*

"Can religion serve once again in the modern Middle East as the foundation for a meaningful pluralism as it did in the premodern Middle East? That is the question raised by this important book."

--Jonathan P. Berkey, *The American Interest*

"The reportage is well-grounded in textured life histories, interviews, and relevant historical narratives and statistics. Pelham offers impressively nuanced interpretations of entangled political rivalries and the hazy religious boundaries that crisscross the Middle East. Readers will find his investigation of the region's intolerance and aspirations for peace refreshing, particularly in the context of increasingly pessimistic headlines and political rhetoric." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A sound, accessible argument for why returning to the mixed-faith communities living among each other in the Ottoman model might just save the Middle East. ... Pelham traces the current crisis of violent, xenophobic sectarianism in the region to the series of forced population transfers and displacements carried out through the 20th century, most critically from the fall of the ethnically diverse Ottoman Empire to the creation of Israel and Pakistan. ... However, Pelham does not see only doom but rather a resurgence of pluralism as a natural, human response given the chance for peaceable community. A lively, succinct, nonpolemical study that will offer much thought for discussion." —starred review, *Kirkus Reviews*

#### About the Author

**Nicolas Pelham** has written about the Middle East since 1992. He began as the editor of *Middle East Times* from Cairo before joining the BBC Arabic Service. He covered the Algerian civil war and the caprice of Colonel Qaddafi as the BBC's correspondent in Rabat. In 2002 he joined the *Financial Times* reporting on the downfall of first Saddam Hussein and then the American protectorate in Baghdad. Since 2010, he has reported on the region's collapse for *The Economist* and *The New York Review of Books*. He is the author of two previous books, *A New Muslim Order* (2008) on Arab Shiite rule, and *A History of the Middle East* (2010) with Peter Mansfield. He lives in London with his wife and three children.

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